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SUBJECT: MAYSAN: THE ISSUES, THE LEADERS, POSSIBLE STEPS FORWARD

Classified By: Deputy PolCouns R. Gilchrist. Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶11. (S) Summary: Maysan provincial authorities hold tenuous control over competing militias in the province, with Sadrist holding the most sway. Maysan's porous border with Iran is a crossing point for smuggled goods, including weapons and other contraband used by anti-Iraqi government groups. The province has significant undeveloped resources, the most important being oil and gas. A resurrected Iraq National Guard could safeguard critical infrastructure installations and projects in the province, which are the targets of looting. Consent winning projects could increase Coalition influence with provincial authorities. This is one of a series of cables issued by the US Embassy Baghdad in conjunction with the Provincial Reconstruction Teams analyzing the governates of Iraq. End Summary.

POLITICAL AND SECURITY ISSUES

¶12. (S/NF) Provincial authorities hold tenuous control over competing militias in the province. Sadrist remain in overall control; but the ability of Sadrist provincial officials to direct the militias nominally is uneven. Maysan's porous border with Iran is a crossing point for smuggled goods, including weapons and other contraband used by anti-Iraqi government groups.

¶13. (S/NF) Security issues in Maysan province both frame and constrain all other types of engagement. The British memories of the immediate Iraqi looting of Camp Abu Najii after the UK withdrew in 2005 are sources of bitterness toward provincial authorities. That experience, along with UK domestic political considerations, has contributed to a decision to hand over the province to Iraqi security forces in early-2007. The terms and conditions of the Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC) Memorandum of Agreement between the CF and Iraqi authorities will be crucial in determining how our future engagement with Maysan will be shaped. The MOA will have significant implications for the Provincial Reconstruction Team's efforts, for further UK/U.S. military and civil affairs presence, and perhaps for the engagement of non-conventional UK/U.S. forces.

¶14. (S/NF) Security issues will also partly determine the extent and the composition of our political engagement with Maysan authorities. MNF operations in Maysan have in the past prompted provincial authorities to &boycott& relations with Coalition Forces. However, the imminence of PIC, the visible fact that other provinces have received substantially more in Coalition funding (especially neighboring Basra), and

the arrival of the first members of the civilian-led PRT appear to have helped break the political logjam.

ECONOMIC ISSUES

¶ 15. (C/NF) Maysan has enormous needs and significant undeveloped resources, the most important being oil and gas. In fact, Maysan's draft Provincial Development Strategy describes the province as one of the poorest provinces on the ground but the richest underground. The potential exploitation of these oil and gas fields, rumored to be the second largest reserves in Iraq, and the sharing of costs and revenues, will be a defining issue for the province. Again, security considerations are paramount. The passage of the hydrocarbon law will be a step forward, but major oil company investment (at least from Western companies) is years away, and Iranian attempts to control at least part of the resources cannot be discounted. In other economic areas, Maysan is significantly underdeveloped. The sector that appears to be a distant second in terms of economic development potential is agriculture. Iraq once exported a significant amount of foodstuffs, but would require intensive rehabilitation and years of technical assistance to develop the sector. Maysan officials optimistically highlight the province's tourism potential (Ziggurat of Ur; marshes in the south) but development of tourist facilities at this point is a pipe dream.

KEY POLITICAL PLAYERS

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¶ 16. (SBU) Key among political players in Maysan is Governor Adhil Mahoder Rahdi Al-Maliki, who was elected in 2005. A former telecommunications engineer in his mid-thirties, the governor comes from Al Majarr Al Kabir, but now lives in Al Amarah. He understands a little English, but uses interpretation in meetings with English-speaking officials. He is a politically-savvy member of the Hussein Ideology Forum (HIF), which is essentially a front for the Office of the Martyr Sadr (OMS) and the largest political grouping in the Provincial Council (6 out of 15 seats.) He has good links with the Iraqi governmental apparatus in Baghdad and is frequently in the capital. He traveled with Prime Minister Ja,afari on a trip to Tehran in early 2005. The Baghdad government established an Emergency Security Committee for Maysan following the violence in October 2006, which has reduced the governor's role in security matters. He appears to be very interested in making progress on reconstruction.

¶ 17. (C) Appointed in 2005, Provincial Council Chairman Abdul-Jabbar Waheed Homaydi has been a difficult interlocutor, prone to posturing and sometimes meaningless obstruction. He was the primary instigator of a &boycott& of relations with MNF during the past eight months, although he has recently become more cooperative. Like the governor, Homaydi is a member of the HIF. Unconfirmed reports say Homaydi was previously the publisher of a newspaper backed by Saddam's son Uday. Provincial Security Council Chairman Abdul-Ridha Hashim Hassan appears to be an honest broker, in the PRT's view, and often acts as a negotiator between the OMS and the IPS. He allies himself with HIF, although he is of a different party, the Al-Ridha Center for Culture and Cautioning

¶ 18. (SBU) Hussain Chalabi Hardan (aka Abu Muslim al-Saadi) is a former national MP from the Transitional National Assembly. He now has no formal political role in the province, but he was reportedly founder of the HIF. When Abu Muslim set up the bloc, it was not a front for OMS, but a forum for moderates. Since the bloc's alliance with OMS, Abu Muslim has all but broken ties with it, and now has established himself as the

leader of an umbrella group advocating moderate parties, views. Deputy Governor Mohan Abdullah Sultan Al-Ja, abiri (aka Abu Mirriam) is the head of Harakat Hizbollah al-Iraq (HH) in Al Amarah and with Abu Hatem (aka the Prince of the Marshes) and Abu Maythem, is a leader of a main militia group. He played a key role in brokering the cease-fire between MNF and JAM/OMS in 2004. He ran under the United Islamic Front in the January 2005 elections and was appointed Deputy Governor.

POSSIBLE STEPS FORWARD

¶9. (C/NF) Maysan's strategic location on the Iranian border, the influence of Iran in the province's affairs, and the presence of exploitable oil resources makes Maysan of obvious strategic importance. Furthering USG interests in Maysan will call for responses to several challenges, the most serious being the security constraints. The transition of militia leaders to responsible political figures and militia members to productive contributors to the overall development of the province will be crucial. One option to consider is a reconstitution of the Iraq National Guard and using it to safeguard critical infrastructure installations and projects in the province, which are the targets of frequent and destructive looting. However, this task begs the question of whether we can develop and sustain a presence in the province to ensure that training and performance is adequate, and to build the relationships with provincial actors that would be necessary to sustain a long-term commitment.

¶10. (C/NF) The uncertain status of our and the UK's post-PIC presence will have tremendous implications for the scope of what USG-led entities, both overt and covert, can accomplish. Handover of the province to Iraqi control could lead to an increase in cooperation of provincial authorities with remaining military advisors/operational units and with the PRT. However, the uncertainty of Iraqi capabilities (military, provincial, and tribal) in controlling violence in Maysan could make security more haphazard. Given this, the USG needs to urgently address the consequences of PIC in Maysan and what they will mean for our future work.

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¶11. (C/NF) The development process in Iraq has often focused on the reconstruction effort and large, essential service infrastructure projects, at the expense of capacity-building. If possible, the tactical effects achieved by consent-winning projects done by civil affairs specialists should be incorporated into the overall development goals for each province, including Maysan. By engaging as frequently as possible with provincial officials on their overall development goals, we have the potential to develop relationships -- particularly with moderates -- that could be politically useful in the long-term. These efforts could be strengthened by additional USG attention and resources in the province. The new PRT would also need practical security support. If security conditions were to gradually improve, the placement of a permanent presence, perhaps through USAID, could provide a platform for mid to long-term development programs in the province.

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